



REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICES OFFICE FOR EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA (REDSO/ESA)

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
Population, Health, and Nutrition Briefing Sheet

Regional Profile

Over the past decade, a wide-ranging economic and democratic renaissance has been taking place throughout Africa. Overall development trends in the majority of African countries are positive, and there is a new realism and pragmatism on the part of African leaders to make the changes necessary to support economic growth and democratic governance.

Unfortunately, however, most countries in the East and Southern Africa (ESA) region continue to suffer some of the worst health conditions in the world and the region's population is set to double in less than 25 years. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has its epicenter in the ESA region, and prevalence of HIV infection is currently estimated at over 10 percent of the adult population in many of the region's countries; recent studies suggest that by the year 2000 economic growth in some of the key countries in the region will be reduced by as much as 20 percent due to negative economic consequences of HIV/AIDS. Throughout the region, there is a continuing and desperate need to improve the effectiveness and coverage of health care systems in order to produce any significant impact on health conditions and population growth rates.

Problems in the health sector in the ESA region are closely tied to food insecurity, particularly in the Greater Horn of Africa (GHA) region, where, despite increased agricultural production over the last three decades, there has been a steady decrease in per capita food production.

USAID Strategy

With relatively modest development and humanitarian investments today, the United States can avoid having to make a more massive humanitarian assistance contribution in future years. REDSO/ESA's diverse regional focus will enable the United States to maintain and enhance longstanding political and economic ties in East and southern Africa while assuring that international donor community efforts in the region will result in sustainable development. In the area of family planning and health, REDSO/ESA seeks to document and promote best practices in a variety of program areas and to advocate for strengthened regional partnerships, improved policy-making, and

enhanced indigenous capacity to overcome development constraints. REDSO/ESA's efforts in family planning and health are complemented by extensive USAID activities in humanitarian assistance and food security and are being deepened and expanded by two important presidential initiatives, the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative (GHAI) to promote disaster preparedness and regional coordination throughout the GHA region, and the African Growth and Opportunity Act of 1998.

Major Program Areas

Advocating Best Practices. Over the last four years, REDSO/ESA has pioneered an approach for working with countries in the region to identify the highest priority regional "cross-cutting" and "cross-border" problems affecting health delivery systems, and for assisting these countries to deal with these problems by facilitating their sharing of lessons learned and better practices.

Strengthening Regional Partnerships. Regional Health Networks developed by REDSO/ESA strive to ensure that successful technologies and approaches are shared, borrowed, and adopted across national borders. The networks are largely African led and serve as a means for USAID and development partners to view family planning and health problems and solutions from a broad regional perspective. Critical program focus areas identified by USAID and African partners include:

- Health care financing;
- Integration of sexually transmitted infection (STI)/HIV services into maternal and child health (MCH) and family planning services;
- Quality of care;
- Postabortion care;
- Adolescent reproductive health;
- Nutrition; and
- Commodity logistics (for essential drugs and contraceptives), and capacity-building, particularly through the Center for African Family Studies (CAFS) regional center.



Bureau for Africa

U.S. Agency for
International Development

1300 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC
20523-3600

Tel: 202-712-0540
Fax: 202-216-3046

E-mail:
africawb@rrs.cdie.org
Website:
www.info.usaid.gov/regions/af

Support to USAID Missions and Regional Projects. REDSO/ESA's Population, Health, and Nutrition team (PHN) assists USAID missions in the ESA region in the areas of strategic planning, program implementation, program monitoring and evaluation, and staff training. The PHN team is also supporting a food security and nutrition monitoring system to be implemented with indigenous organizations in GHAI focus countries.

Results

REDSO/ESA's regional health efforts are beginning to have a large pay off, producing tangible results in national policy making, service delivery, donor coordination, and USAID program development. With REDSO/ESA assistance:

- Ethiopia, the region's largest country, now has a health care financing policy.
- Four ESA countries are developing programs to deal with problems of adolescent reproductive health.
- Countries throughout the region are using regionally developed guidelines to integrate HIV/AIDS services with those of established family planning/MCH programs.
- An effective cost-sharing scheme developed in Kenya has been replicated in two neighboring countries and is being considered for replication in a third.
- The Center for African Family Studies (CAFS) has developed and is expanding a roster of African consultants who provide a diverse range of technical assistance.
- African health professionals are increasingly aware of the regional nature of the problems they are facing and the benefits that can accrue from tackling their problems together.
- Fifteen USAID country programs in the region have targeted results that will have a direct impact on stabilizing the population growth rate and protecting human health.

Success Stories

Sharing of Key Information and Ideas.

REDSO/ESA's health networks have facilitated communication about successful approaches among an extensive network of service delivery groups (governmental, private, and NGO) in the region. Partnerships established through the networks,

including USAID missions; six ministries of health; a regional coordinating body representing 14 ESA countries; private hospital systems in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania; and two major donors, led to USAID's first Africawide initiative in health care financing. A joint planning process led by REDSO/ESA developed the agency's first strategic framework focusing on adolescent reproductive health in the region. A regional logistics initiative spearheaded by REDSO/ESA is working to improve supply of essential commodities for child survival, STI prevention and control, and family planning. Network activities in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Mozambique, Botswana, and Zambia provide critical information on integration of HIV prevention and family planning services and affordable and practical improvements in the quality of health services.

Effective Donor Coordination and Programming of Scarce Development Resources. In 1996, REDSO/ESA assistance led an exercise in Eritrea that brought together key government decision-makers and other donors in the health sector in a series of work sessions, resulting in a health strategy for USAID/Eritrea that is an integral part of the overall Government of Eritrea health strategy and ensures coordination of donor resources in the sector.

Continuing Challenges

In recent years, the countries of East and southern Africa have invested significant resources in efforts to address critical development challenges. These efforts continue to be hampered by natural disasters, limited progress in democratization and governance, high population growth rates that continue to outstrip gains in agricultural production, food insecurity, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The fact that many difficulties persist, with impacts that reach across national boundaries, is one indication of the need for the development of innovative solutions and better coordinated regional approaches. REDSO/ESA will continue to work closely with regional partners to address regional concerns, while directly assisting East Africa USAID missions, emphasizing the need for strategies that incorporate regional concerns.



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